

Executive Summary

DROPPING OUT AND DELINQUENCY AMONG
PUERTO RICAN YOUTHS:
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

FINAL REPORT

JANUARY 1984

Manuel J. Gutierrez, Ph.D.
Braulio Montalvo, M.A.

ASPIRA, Inc. of Pennsylvania

Prepared under Grant Number 79-JN-AX-0024 from the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S. Department of Justice.

The conclusions and interpretations presented in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

INTRODUCTION:

A three year longitudinal study was conducted which sought to identify links between dropping out and delinquency, explore whether the educational situation of dropping out among Puerto Rican youths in Philadelphia has changed, and searched for differences between youngsters in public and parochial schools.

The study, funded by the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, was conducted for ASPIRA, Inc. of Pennsylvania, by Manuel J. Gutierrez, Ph.D., and Braulio Montalvo, M.A., the co-principal investigators.

A cohort of 505 male and female Puerto Rican 10th graders in Philadelphia, and their mothers (or other legal guardian) were surveyed during the study's first year and were followed up on a yearly basis for two subsequent years. The sample retention rate was 84% from Year 1 to Year 3 of the study.

STUDY HIGHLIGHTS:

- ° Differences between public and parochial school youngsters. Very few dropouts and delinquents for parochial school.
- ° At each year, significant association between dropping out and delinquency.
- ° Most dropouts do not become delinquent. Two distinct paths with some overlap.
- ° No evidence that dropouts increased delinquent activities after dropping out.

- ° Differences between males and females. Little delinquency for females (drop out due to pregnancy).
- ° Differences for public school dropouts at the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades; 10th grade dropouts were a more vulnerable population, with a higher incidence of delinquency involvement and more feeble family resources.
- ° Changes in delinquency patterns over a three-year period; small group remains delinquent over time (7% from Year 1 to Year 3).
- ° More than one-third (34.7%) of youngsters entering the 10th grade has left school by their senior year.
- ° Fewer than 8% of public school youngsters who dropped out returned to school to complete their education.
- ° Family's differential use of educational systems, public vs. parochial, relevant to issue of delinquency control.
- ° Remarkable similarities along family variables between Parochial non-delinquent stay-ins and Public non-delinquent stay-ins, other than SES.
- ° Delinquency is seen as a multivariate phenomenon significantly associate to:
 - Drug and alcohol use, and acting-out behavior;
 - A family where mother exerts ineffectual vigilance and influence over her son's behavior and peer relations;
 - Delinquent friends who also use drugs and alcohol;
 - Maladaptive response to the dilemma of culture clash. Mother tends to come from rural Puerto Rico and lacks adaptation to the new urban American culture; she also expresses distance from her cultural roots;

- A gap between mother and son regarding hopes and fears for the future.
- * In another multivariate relationship, dropping out was significantly associated to:
 - Public school attendance;
 - Lower proficiency in English and previous attendance in bilingual education program;
 - Drug and alcohol use, and acting-out behavior;
 - Pregnancy and children, for females;
 - Delinquent involvement, for males;
 - Dropout friends;
 - History of school-based difficulties, including grade retention, truancy, and perception of school as an unsafe place;
 - Low maternal cross-cultural competence; mother has low proficiency in English, less employment, and less education;
 - Families who exhibit lack of organization and rituals. Mothers go to church less frequently and there is a lack of structure at home for doing school assignments.
 - Somewhat lower socio-economic status, including less employment for fathers (especially at year 1).
- * At the theoretical level, results suggest a dynamic balance of forces between three primary systems: family, peers, and institutions, working to prevent or facilitate delinquency.
 - Delinquency is seen as a specific imbalance of these forces which creates an erosion of influence over the youngster on the part of the parents while the outside peers increase their hold over socialization processes and the school not only proves inadequate to compensate for the family's insufficiency, but it also augments the related problems.
 - The erosion of the family's leverage over the youngster in the study sample is further compounded by acculturation

dilemmas--the attempting of an adaptation to a new culture with few skills and resources on the family's part, and limited opportunities on the part of the surrounding society (i.e. lack of employment, unsuitable schools, poor housing).

- From the standpoint of a balance of forces theory, it appears important to approach delinquency as a symptom of disequilibrium between broader systems of influence. Change in those broader systems would entail modifications in the restricted and fragmented resources now available to these families. This would result in a strengthening of the family's influence over the youngster--his peers, his school, and other sectors participating in the socialization process. This, in turn, would help prevent delinquency.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

- * In terms of the dropout problem, recommendations include:
 - A radical enhancement of standards of excellence in schools;
 - Programs orienting parents to recognize and demand quality in education;
 - A thorough review and overhaul of the bilingual education program;
 - Enhanced mechanisms for parents' participation in making schools accountable;
 - Institutional empowerment of parents, with coalitions of parents' groups working together to monitor and influence decision-making processes between School Board and Teacher's Union shaping school programs;
 - A renewed emergency emphasis on programs for accelerated academic remediation, before the gap between a youngster-at-risk and his peers widen;
 - Further development of effective work-study programs, with priority for youngsters in families facing economic hardship.

- ° In terms of the delinquency problem, recommendations entail:
 - Offer strong support for institutions and agencies enhancing the family's ties to its culture, identity, and traditions while helping them cope with the youngster's socialization needs;
 - Give special emphasis to agency involvement strengthening parental supervision of the youngster and his/her peers.
 - Plan and generate long-term changes in social mobility and economic opportunity as means of preventing social distress and delinquency.

FINAL NOTE:

Full copies of the full 200 page Final Report can be reviewed at any branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Other copies will be made available at a future date by ASPIRA, 526 W. Girard Ave., Phila. PA. 19123, (215)923-2717. Emanuel Ortiz, Executive Director.